

Who I Am

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Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

- [0 : 0 0] We'll be carrying on our series looking at the Trinity tonight. We read in Exodus 3, just verse 14. It's one of the verses we'll see later on, but just have it in the back of our minds.
- Verse 14 of Exodus 3. Moses has asked God, Who do I say you are? Verse 14. God said to Moses, I am who I am.
- And he said, Say this to the people of Israel. I am has sent me to you. As we carry on this evening looking at our series, just to help us, we'll read just one short section from the Confession.
- It's chapter 2 in the first section. It's talking about God and the Trinity, of who our God is and who our Godhead is. The verses we know well are section, the segment we know well.
- There is but one only, living and through God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute.
- [1 : 2 5] And so on. This evening we are focusing just on one small section of that. I'll get in a second. If you remember last time we dug right into the depths.
- And I can say it now, I was worried perhaps we were digging too far into the depths. But to God's glory, I think we hopefully emerged from the depths with at least a greater sense of who our God is and understanding of how he relates himself to us.
- So remember last time we saw how the Trinity in Scripture is seen at least appearing in two different fronts. We see the imminent Trinity.
- We saw that that tells us who God is within himself. How the Godhead relates person to person within the Godhead.
- We also saw then the economic Trinity, which is how God works in space and time with different roles that the persons of the Trinity take on, of the Father sending and the Son coming and the Spirit sanctifying and so on.
- [2 : 2 9] Before we delve further then into questions and answers of who our God is, tonight we have to ask, and not answer, but tonight we'll give the very framework of an answer for the question.
- It feels like a bad question to ask, but it's okay to ask it. What is God? Not who is God, but what is God? And we're glad we have a confession to help us.
- It's a question perhaps we are strange to ask, but our forefathers were not strange to ask it. Again, the confession here deals with answering that very question of what is God?
- Now, we're dealing here, I know we always say this, but especially this evening, if we've felt out of our depth before, I can assure you we're going to feel it again this evening.
- But that's good. It's good for us in this situation to feel out of our depth. And don't think for a second in any part of this series, but especially this evening, that I am here to lecture you with all the answers to the questions that might come into your mind.

[3 : 37] Because for many of the questions you might have, I am willing to say there probably are no answers we can humanly articulate. Because we are dealing here, again, with a reality we can't understand fully.

But one the Lord does make clear to us in short ways and simple ways. He gives us enough to understand. But also not enough that we aren't then left with glorious questions to ask about who our God is and what he is like.

So what is our God? Again, the confession, thankfully, gives us three things to think about for ourselves in a short time together.

Our God is without body, without parts, and without passions. And also he is immutable. We'll see that more later on, but just in the back of our minds.

He is without body, he is without parts, and he is without passions. First of all, we can see then these two things that God is not. These are obvious things to us, but let's just dig into them.

[4 : 43] God has no body, and God has no passions. We know ourselves from Scripture, also from Confession. But simply, we ask the question, well, what is God?

Well, God is Spirit. God is Spirit. God is Spirit. A most pure Spirit, as we read there just now. He is the most pure Spirit. Now, the question then is, well, what is a Spirit?

What is Spirit? What does it mean that God is the most pure Spirit? And there, our humanity stops us. And there, the divine reality begins.

So we can say God is Spirit. We can all affirm that, and I hope we do affirm that. We know that. He is not like us. He is not created. He is the Creator. He doesn't appear.

He doesn't exist in form like we have. He is Spirit. He is most pure Spirit. He is Spirit. And that's where we stop, in one sense.

[5 : 52] Because we can't go any further. And you can read all you want. And there's some who will give ideas and conjectures. But any reputable source will skirt around the area there.

We'll discuss what it means. But we can't go past that. The question, though, what is Spirit? That we can't even begin to understand how to answer that as humans.

Never mind actually answer it. He has no body. We know that. We believe that. The question comes, well, what about the Son? If we're saying God has no body, how then can the Son exist?

How can the Son be incarnated? How can he take on human flesh if we're saying God has no body? How can the Son be incarnated? Well, thankfully, again, the Church has grappled with this over thousands of years.

The first century fathers, they, very handily for us, coined a very good phrase to think about the Son. Remaining what he was, he became what he was not.

[6 : 58] So remaining what he was, he became what he was not. Remaining what he was, Spirit, divine. The Son was always God.

The Son was always divine. The Son was always part of the triune Godhead. We know that. He remained divine. He remained Spirit. He remained God.

But he became what he was not previously, which is, of course, incarnate. He became fully human.

But when Jesus became fully human, yes, he laid aside much of the privilege of his divinity. We know that. We've covered that before. We'll cover it again. He laid aside much of his privilege.

He did not lay aside the divinity itself. Not for a second on earth. Not for a second when he was born into his own creation did the Son lose a single bit of his divinity.

[7 : 56] And within a second why we can't even use that language. He lost none of his divinity. He remained fully God. For all the hours and days and weeks and seconds and milliseconds of this world, he remained God.

Professor Janangas in college, he'd often remind us that in one sense, whilst Jesus was in the crib or Jesus was in his mother's arms or Jesus was being changed or fed or being taught to walk, at the same time, he is ruling and reigning over his own creation.

Now, the mystery of that should astound us and it does astound us. It's his world, the way made through him, made for him, sustained by him as we've seen in previous weeks.

But yet he was here fully human, whilst losing none of his divinity. As John tells us, quite simply, the word became flesh.

The word became flesh. By taking on full humanity, he lost none of his full divinity.

[9 : 12] God has no body. That much we understand. That's the easy part. We all understand that. He is not like us. He made us. In his image, yes, but we know that is not a physical thing.

He is not us. He is spirit. He also found out from the confession, summarizing scripture, God has no passions.

Now, that phrase, that word has confused many. Especially laterally, it's confused many as you come into the later half of our own century. The fact that we say that God has no passions in the confession, it doesn't mean that God doesn't care.

It doesn't mean that God has no feelings, as it were, has no cares, has no, as Professor McLeod has said, has an emotional life. We say throughout scripture, God loves in scripture.

God hates in scripture. God is jealous. God is angry. God has a full range, we see, of perfection in his expression of emotion.

[10 : 20] So what does it mean? That God has no passions. We affirm it. The confession teaches it from scripture. But this is one of these situations where the word has changed over the years.

When the divines first wrote the word passions here, at the time that the confession was written in common English, a passion was used more for an extreme behaviour, an erratic behaviour.

In other words, we're confirming here and affirming here, God has no passions. He is fully measured in his full, as it were, emotional range. He doesn't behave strangely.

You can count on him for being the same, as we know, yesterday, today and for all time. One day, we won't wake up and we realise now God hates us.

No, God is clear. God is logical. And God is perfect in how he relates to us. There is no unmeasured extreme of his emotion.

[11 : 27] In other words, the Lord is not like us. The Lord is not like us. He does not have passions. At times, we'll admit, I'm sure, we are unmeasured in how we react to situations.

We're unmeasured in how we relate to other people. Someone can do something quite by accident to annoy us. And to our shame, perhaps, we are far too annoyed or far too angry at that person.

A small example. Bigger examples. We can flow from emotional state to emotional state, depending on what life is like. When life is stressful and things are hard, often our fuses are shorter and shorter and shorter.

About sin, we know. There is anger in us. There is wrath in us. But it's not measured. It's unmeasured. God is unlike us in his passions and his emotions.

He is measured in all that he does. In every way that he acts. He is perfect. We give him praise for that. We often say, when preaching of God's love towards us and God's grace towards us.

- [12 : 42] If we were in charge of the grace that was shown to us, would we be as graceful? Probably not. If you were there in charge of how much grace was to be shown to you. And you see yourself rebel and sin and rebel and sin again and again. You think, I'm done with you. I'm done with you. We praise the Lord.

The Lord is not like that. He is measured. And his emotions, they are, the literal sense, they are perfect.

They are perfect. Every way he acts is perfect. Everything he does is perfect. He has no passions. He is measured in everything he does.

So unlike us, he has no body. We know that. Unlike us, he doesn't have erratic emotional states. He is measured.

- [13 : 44] Then we have this other section. And this is our main focus the next wee while of this evening. God has no parts.

Remember, when I first started reading the confession, probably in Sunday school. I used to miss out the comma there. And you'd miss it quite easily. And I would read quite happily. Invisible.

Without body, parts, or passions. With a comma there. Without body, comma, parts, comma, or passions. Without body, without passions, we've covered.

But what does it mean here that God is without parts? This is the centre point of our time.

This is actually the centre point, as I think what Ferguson will say, of what's being communicated in this section. God is not like us. He is not made up of a collection of parts.

- [14 : 43] Now, obviously, it doesn't take a minister in four years of a degree to teach anyone that. It's obvious. And it's a simple point.

God is not like us. He is not made up of a collection of parts. He doesn't have organs or limbs. We understand that.

We affirm that. He doesn't have a body. We just said that. But God not having parts, it also means that he is also not made up of different attributes put together.

And here's perhaps where we begin to unravel a wee bit. We tend to project our complexity of being, that we're a body of different parts and we have different ideas and thoughts and different emotions.

And we are sometimes happy, sometimes sad. We're sometimes this, sometimes that more than the other thing. We project that onto God. The confession says, no, God is not made up of parts.

- [15 : 47] He is not us. He is spirit. Without realising then, we sometimes think to ourselves, with respect, that God is there and that part of him is perfect righteousness.

Part of him is perfect justice. Part of him is love. Part of him is omnipotent and so on and so on. As you name all the qualities, as you name all the attributes of God.

But that is not what we see in Scripture. The theological term for this is God is simple. God is simple. The simplicity of God is something that's been argued for and defended from the very, very start of the early church.

We'll see that in a second. God is simple. He is not made up of parts. God is simple. God is simple. God is simple. I think I will. Right now, this sounds anything other than simple.

This sounds completely like you're straining at a gnat here. When we say God is simple, it doesn't refer to knowledge.

[17 : 03] It refers in terms of his number of parts. He is not many good things that come together. He is one. We affirm that in a second as we read in Exodus.

This is not just some conjecture. Scripture points it out to us. Numbers 23, 17. God is not man that he should lie. Or a son of man that he should change his mind.

He has said and will he not do it. He is simple. God does not change his mind. Nor is he changeable. We see that in the word there we have next.

God is immutable. That's a word that tells us he does not change his mind. He isn't swayed or convinced a different way. God's will is his will.

And his will is completed as he's planned to complete it from before time and in time. His eternal will. It is one. It is set. It is complete. He is immutable.

[18 : 05] He cannot be swayed by other forces. There is no force that has an impact on God because he is God. His will is simple. It is one.

It is singular. 1 John 1 verse 5. God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

God is not partly light or mostly light or part of him is aware as perfect light. God is light. That brings to mind, isn't it, later on in 1 John. The most obvious example for us to show this doctrine.

1 John 4 verse 8. Anyone who does not love does not know God. Why? Because God is love.

God is not partly love. God is not love at certain times. As John makes clear, God is light and God is love.

[19 : 05] The ultimate example is the chapter we had in verse 14 there of Exodus. Where when Moses says to God, who do I say sent me?

Poor Moses. We see you can hear a strain in his voice. God says, I am who I am. In English, we can't really capture the full beauty, but also the full simplicity of what's being said.

You see, if you've got the church Bibles, there are wee one going down to the bottom there. Where I am who I am is also easily translated as, I am what I am, or I will be what I will be.

They all mean the exact same thing. These words, exact same. In other words, I am God. I am God. I am what I am.

I am who I am. I am that I am. There's no parts in me. There's no sections to me. I am simple. I am God. He is that he is.

[20 : 10] He cannot be divided into parts or dissected or perceived as we are. He is spirit. As the Bible tells us and as confession reminds us, he is a simple, pure spirit.

He has made us altogether unlike himself. We are parts and we are bits and pieces. And that's how we've been made. And we can't really visualize anything to be different because it's not like us.

But God is not like us. We have a physical life and emotional life. And in our emotional life, there's bits of us that are happy at times and sad at times and good at times and not so good at times.

And all the variety of our emotional life and our physical life. That's how we see the world. That's how we experience the world. Not so with God. He is without parts.

But there's none other like him. He is simple. He is God. This has been confessed, as we said from the very start. That God is not made up of parts.

[21 : 18] We worship a simple God. We worship a simple God. The best book I've read, written on the topic. It's called All That Is In God.

By a man who... James Dolezal. D-O-L-E-Z-A-L. American professor. And he has a chunky book about God.

The simplicity of God. And the summary of this whole chunky book is said at the start and the end. And he says, All that is in God is God.

Divine simplicity. It reminds us, this doctrine reminds us, that we are eternally different from God. When we come to God in prayer and in worship, we're approaching one who is eternally not like us.

But as we approach him also, his divine simplicity is a comfort for us. So we approach one in times of mourning. We approach one looking perhaps for comfort.

[22 : 30] Well, you approach one who is simple. One who is eternally and fully the God of all comfort. In times of darkness, spiritually or mentally or physically, when life is hard, when your mind is hard, when health situations are hard, or family situations, whatever, when all we are is hard and dark, we come to one who is simple and who is light.

Who is fully light. When we come having been wronged, or we come to God seeing the injustice and the evil in the world, perhaps injustice or evil in our own experience, we come to one who is fully just.

Who is simple. Who is all justice. As we approach the love, the light, the justice, etc.

of God, we do so approaching a God who is fully and eternally that attribute we come searching and seeking him for. That is a glory.

That is a power. That is a wonder of why it's good for us to think that he is God and we are not. We are made of parts and bits and pieces. He is divinely, eternally, simple.

[23 : 55] There is no parts. There is no variation. There is no changing. There is no bending of will or plan. In God, there is God.

And God does what he will do. And God plans what he has planned to do. We approach God this evening in worship. We approach a God who is altogether, every single one of his attributes, in its fullness, in its eternality, and I hope we're saying just now, what, what does that mean?

And interestingly enough, the confession, the church fathers, the theologians, and scripture itself, to be honest, it pretty much ends there.

We can't really get past any more than that because we can never understand what he is outside of our own experience because he made us and he made us as we are.

And the glorious through teaching of divine simplicity, it reminds us that we are not him, that he is not us, not just in goodness or holiness or power, but in our very essence, we are not him and he is not us.

[25 : 24] He is altogether beautiful. He is altogether different. He is altogether glorious. Which makes it even more incredible when we think that our saviour took on human flesh, was born into this world, and experienced the full emotional range of what it is to be human.

Sadness, tiredness, pain, hunger, and thirst, physical, mental, spiritual exhaustion, and all the other experiences of the full humanity of our saviour.

It makes his incarnation all the more beautiful. And you think what it is he incarnated from. He left, set aside the great privilege of that simplicity and in his body whilst being fully God, he also took on himself what he was not, a human existence, a human experience.

And he saw the world as a way through our eyes and experienced it through our experience. Such is the love of God for us, such is the beauty and wonder of our God.

And really, we want to leave this evening praising God, saying, Lord, we don't understand. And we praise him for that because he is God and we are not. But it is goodness towards us.

[26 : 56] He's given us enough just to grasp the very basics of this truth. And we have all eternity then, we pray and we hope and we long for to wrestle with this truth and to hopefully make more sense of it for us when we see him face to face and see him as he is.

until that day, this is where we have to end this teaching on theology of this one section of God's simplicity. God cared enough.

Our Saviour cared enough to leave all we said this evening, to lay aside the full benefit of that and to lay aside that benefit and take on human flesh and come and live and die as one of his own people.

we praise him for that. I mean, that's Ben, a few words of prayer. we praise him, Lord, and we cannot begin to fathom the depths of who and what you are.

Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to spend time looking at our words this evening to try and understand it more. The more we know, the more we realise we don't know anything at all.

[28 : 19] Lord, we ask that you would shape our experiences, that you would guide us so that we could see you more and more in our day-to-day lives. Lord, we thank you that you came into this world, that you sent your son to take on flesh, to be an infant in a crib, to be cared for and needing everything a baby needs, Lord, right the way through to his death on the cross and resurrection afterwards.

Lord, we thank you for that experience that he had to be able to come alongside us, to be able to comfort us in times of hardship, to rejoice with us in times of gladness.

And Lord, we thank you that we have a Saviour who knows our weaknesses and knows our strengths and knows what support we need, Lord. we ask that as we go about our day-to-day lives, Lord, that we would rely more on you for our strength and for our guidance and for our joy as well, Lord.

We ask that we would be based more in you, the unchangeable God, that we would be based less on ourselves and the changing of the wind that is the world around us, Lord.

We ask that we would be resting on you, safe and secure in the knowledge of who you are in your covenants to us and to the people who we know and care for as well around us.

[29 : 43] Lord, we ask that you would equip us as a congregation and as a people to be able to share these truths with the village around us, Lord, and our families and our friends and our colleagues, Lord, that we would be able to point people towards you so that they would also be able to start to see your wonders and see what you have done before them so that they would then start to proclaim you as their saviour too.

Lord, we ask that you would just be with us in quiet moments and noisy moments, Lord, that you would be with us, letting us know that you are there and that you are for us. Lord, that we can come to you with big things and small things and, Lord, we ask that you would be with us all.

Give us that assurance and that strength to go on with you. We're sorry for the sins that we commit so easily, Lord, we ask that you would heal us and that you would clean the claims of the Lord's sins.

We ask that you would forgive us the blood of our Lord and Jesus Christ. We can have bigger time to an endless evening. Psalm 36.

It's got your Psalter. Psalm 36, verses 5, down to verse 9. Psalm 36, verses 5, down to verse 9.

[31 : 12] Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens. Thy truth do I have reached the clouds. Thy justice is like mountains great. Thy judgments deep as floods. Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How precious is thy grace.

Therefore, in shadow of thy wings, men's sons, their trust shall place. Psalm 36, 5-9.
God's praise. War, I have filled with scouts, my earth hath leg of the súborn în fund■ Dei
destaca s Healthy Santa o de Haw by judgment deep as last.

Lord, thou preserve as man of peace, how precious is thy grace.

Wherefore in shadow walk thy wings, may sons their trance shall place.

They will the fullness of thy hearts shall be as satisfied.

[32 : 43] From rivers of thy pleasures thou will drink to them provide.

Because of life the fountain pure remains alone with peace.

And in that pure side of vine we clear in life shall see.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit for with you now and forevermore. Amen.